

In the Beginning!

For us the story starts on the **6th May 1840** - the date when the first pre-paid adhesive labels were issued in Great Britain as part of the 'Uniform Penny Postage'. As a happy consequence the nation was introduced to the **Penny Black** cancelled with a **Bright Red** Maltese Cross. However, it wasn't long before the general public cottoned on to the fact that the red cancel could be removed and the adhesive label re-used, so 'something for nothing'. To combat this, roles were reversed, resulting in **Penny Reds** being cancelled by **Black** Maltese Crosses. There were numerous other changes over the next quarter of a century or so - Maltese Crosses were replaced first by Numerals and then by Duplex Cancels, Perforation introduced to make separation of the labels from the sheet easier, changes in the Watermark applied to the paper, and the introduction of 'visible' Plate Numbers - all of which is the 'stuff' of philately.

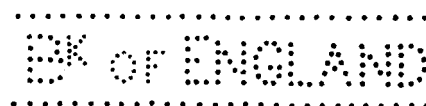


A problem companies increasingly faced in the mid-Victorian era was the 'theft' of mint postage stamps by clerks and others, which could then be exchanged at Post Offices for cash (less a small handling charge) or in exchange for goods from unscrupulous grocers and merchants. In an attempt to deter such theft, companies began to 'unofficially' underprint and overprint their stamps with the name of the owning company, a system which the Post Office officially offered in **1867** after successful lobbying by **J & C Boyd & Co.** The 'official' underprints were printed by the printers, **Perkins, Bacon & Co.**, in the colour of the stamp *before* the gum was applied to the sheet. This process was somewhat inconvenient for small to medium sized businesses requiring relatively small quantities of stamps at short notice.



Of the fifty or so companies that are known to have protected their postage stamps in this way, only **five** availed themselves of the 'official' route, an example of each is shown on the bottom row above. The last company to start using this facility was the Great Eastern Railway in **1873**. The facility was withdrawn in **1882**, by which time a much more convenient way to deter theft had been accepted - the use of **Perfins**.

To explain the introduction of **Perfins** we must roll back the years to **1858**, specifically to September 1st, when a Builder and Decorator by the name of **Joseph Sloper** was granted 'Letters Patent' protecting his invention for '*Indelibly Crossing or Marking Bankers' Cheques etc.*', for a period of fourteen years. His idea was simplicity itself, in that the word 'PAID' (or indeed any other series of letters and words) could be perforated through the Cheque with each letter formed by a series of small, circular holes producing an 'irreversible' process.



Typical Sloper Cheque 'Crossing' die dating from January 1865.

The idea to perforate postage stamps actually came from **Copetake, Moore, Crampton & Co** who asked the G.P.O., in a letter dated 23rd October 1867, if they might be allowed to perforate the large quantities of loose stamps that came into their offices in the form of remittances, with the initials of their senior partner **Sampson Copetake**. The question was not answered by the G.P.O., so Copetakess wrote again on 2nd January 1868 enclosing several stamps perforated "SC". The G.P.O. refused permission immediately.



Although it is not known exactly how many 'sample' stamps were sent to the G.P.O., **four** are known to have survived the passage of time, one of which is shown above. As the stamps had been perforated 'SC' by Joseph Sloper on behalf of Copetakess, they referred the matter to him.

Joseph Sloper lost no time in contacting the Post Office, and was granted an audience with G.P.O. officials at St Martin's le Grand on 12th February 1868. Realising that his system had received only sympathetic interest at this latest meeting he wrote again on the 15th February 1868, this time to the Post Master General specifically seeking official permission to perforate postage stamps. The G.P.O. asked him to call again on 24th February 1868, when the Chief Clerk, a Mr Rodie Parkhurst, re-iterated the official view which was **not** to give permission.

Undeterred, Joseph Sloper wrote again on the 27th February 1868, again seeking official permission to perforate postage stamps. This time he enclosed a cutting from the '**Manchester Examiner**' dated 21st February 1868 reporting a criminal case in Manchester involving 7,820 postage stamps amounting to almost £36. These had all been stolen by errand boys and junior clerks and exchanged for bread & cheese from a certain John Howarth, Provision Dealer.

This newspaper clipping must have been the catalyst for a further in depth review by the Post Office, which found in favour of perforating postage stamps with firms' initials. Joseph Sloper was informed in a letter from Mr Rodie Parkhurst dated **13th March 1868**, that the **Postmaster General will not object to the perforation of Postage Stamps in the manner described by you.**

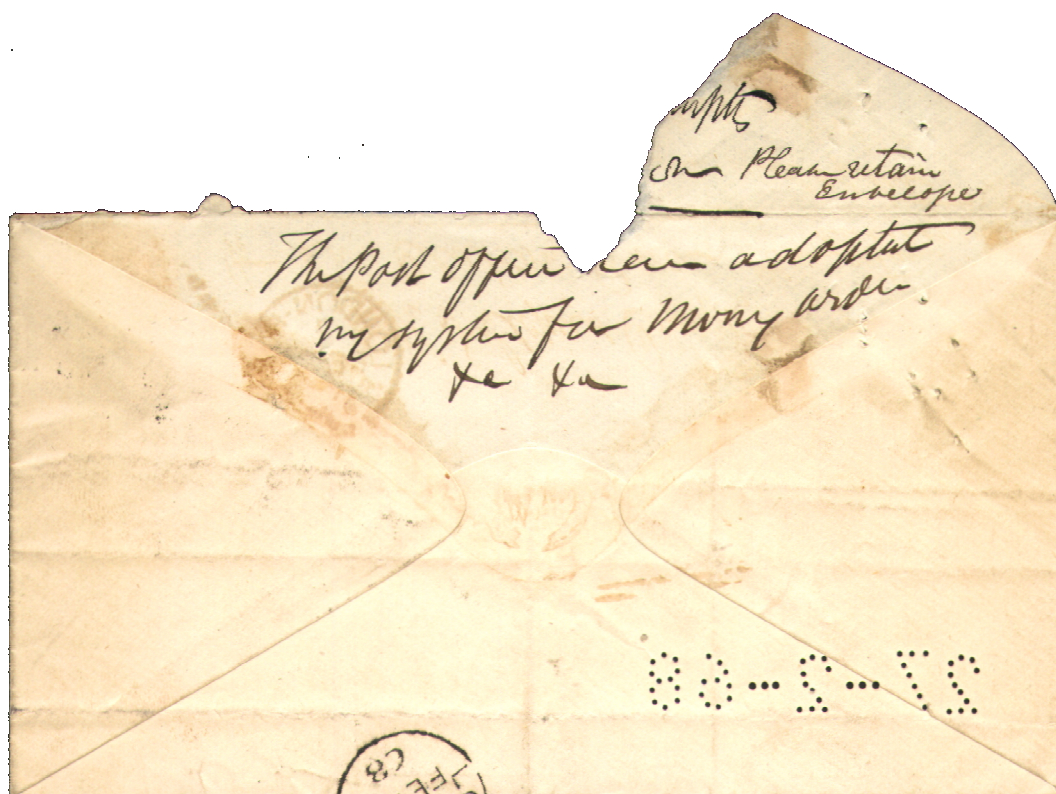


Here we see a photograph, dated 1873, of **Joseph Sloper** aged 60 on his 'carte-de-visite'.
© Science Museum - Science & Society Picture Library.

To date, only two loose postage stamps with Perfins have ever been reported with 1868 dates, and *no covers at all*. In fact only *forty-seven* covers have been reported with 1869 dates, involving just seven different Perfin dies. From all of this we must assume that the take-up of Perfins proceeded at a relatively slow pace.

Well, that *was* the situation until 2015 when the cover below came onto the market. It is clearly dated 28th February 1868, and addressed to F Clutson Esq^{re} in the Accounts Office of the **Great Western Railway** at their H/Q in Paddington. This would have been written by Joseph Sloper himself and bears his hitherto unknown 'Personal Perfin' "**JS**". The letter was no doubt intended to drum up trade for the stamp perforating business that he was eager to get underway.





Unfortunately the flap to the cover is torn, probably when it was opened in 1868, and only a portion of it survives, but it reveals a message from Joseph Sloper to the addressee, with an additional request in a different hand and thinner nib which reads '*Please retain Envelope*'. The lower portion is virtually complete and reads:

'The Post Office have adopted my system for Mony [sic] Order'.

Note that the letter is perforated through with '27-2-68', the day Joseph Sloper wrote to the Post Office for a second time requesting official sanction to perforate postage stamps. Here we can see that he's implying his system can be used for postage stamps, but he's careful to only mention Money Orders which would have been covered by the original use for his 1858 patent.

It's probable that we have the addressee **Frederick Clutson** (1825-1876) to thank for asking for the envelope to be retained, but how and when it found its way to New South Wales, which is where it was repatriated from in September 2015, remains a mystery.

Frederick Clutson was born in 1825 at Nether Stowey, a small village near Bridgwater in Somerset. By the time of the 1851 census he is recorded as a *National School Master*, but by 1858 he is known to be a shareholder in the Great Western Railway. In both the 1861 and 1871 censuses he's recorded as a *Railway Accountant* living in Paddington (1861) and Hammersmith (1871), and by then an employee of the Great Western Railway. He married Emma Davis Rich in 1858, and together they had two sons (Frederick Rich Davis and Arthur Davis) and a daughter (Emma Rich). Sadly, Frederick died on the 27th December 1876 at the relatively young age of 51.

Since this exhibit was shown at the Perfin Society AGM in October 2015, *John Mathews* has found this Sloper 'printed circular' which was acquired by the National Postal Museum in 1993 and illustrated in Bulletin N^o. 272 (October 1994). The stamp affixed is a 1d Red plate 96 with Perfin "GR/W". Could this have been the original contents of the 1868 cover? After all, it is dedicated to the same '*F Clutson Esq^{re}*' with the exact same note that appeared inside the envelope, and all in the bold, hurried handwriting of Joseph Sloper himself.

J. F. Clutson Esq^{re} with Sloper's Compliment

Postage Stamps—Important Case.

The following extract was made from the "MANCHESTER EXAMINER" of 21st February, and appeared in other Provincial and London Papers:—

"CHARGE OF 'RECEIVING' 7,000 STAMPS.—At the Manchester Police-court on Wednesday *John Howarth*, provision-dealer, Cross-street, was charged with receiving, from errand-boys and junior clerks in various Manchester offices, a large number of stamps in payment for bread and cheese, he well knowing the said stamps to have been stolen. Inspector Shandley said he searched the prisoner's premises, and in a drawer he found 4,800 penny stamps, 810 twopenny stamps, and 2,210 receipt stamps; the total number being 7,820, and the value 35*l*. 19*s*. 2*d*. The majority of them were new stamps—that is to say, they had not been stuck upon letters, but a certain portion of them—and these the officer found done up in a packet by themselves—had the appearance of having been fixed upon letters and taken off again, the edges being slightly jagged and the 'striking stuff' looking not fresh. In fact, the charge against the prisoner originated in a letter being so tampered with. Mr. Slater, St. Ann's-square, suspecting something amiss in the posting of a letter containing two halves of 5*l*. notes—the letter not having been heard of—had asked Inspector Shandley to make inquiries. The result was that the errand boy confessed he had kept back the letter for the sake of the penny stamp (with which he bought a bun at the prisoner's shop), and when he found, on tearing the letter in two, that it was a money letter, he became frightened at what he had done, and he tucked the letter and the enclosed half notes between the bars of a 'grid' in Red Lion-street, where the officer found them. The stipendiary magistrate (Mr. Fowler) thought it a most important case, and he remanded the prisoner for a week to enable Inspector Shandley to make the most searching inquiry possible."

A plan has been devised in connection with "SLOPER'S PATENT PERFORATING SYSTEM" for *effectually* preventing the recurrence of such cases in future, and has been submitted to and allowed by the Post Office Authorities.

This plan, which has just been adopted by many of the most influential Firms and Public Companies in London, will be in full operation as soon as the Patentee has prepared his Machinery to meet the demands which he anticipates,

All applications addressed to—"THE MANAGER,
"Office for Sloper's Patent,
-WALBROOK HOUSE, WALBROOK, LONDON."

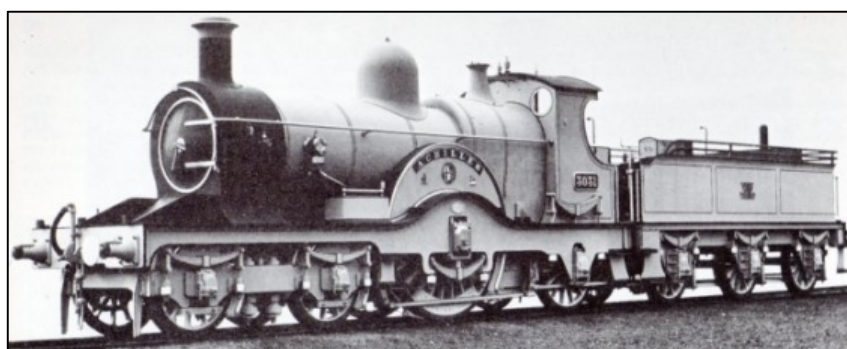
The Post Office has adopted the system for money orders &c &c

We know that Joseph Sloper was successful in selling his idea to the *Great Western Railway*, as six of the forty-seven known 1869 covers bear the Perfin “GR/W”. The example below, which came from the General Managers Office, is clearly dated 31st May 1869 and addressed to ‘C Richards Esq, Llangollen’. Gone are the days when letters could be addressed so briefly and still be delivered successfully to the intended recipient.



Countless books have been written over the years about the *Great Western Railway*, so I will content myself here with a single ‘snippet’.

The Great Western Railway stood alone with its 7ft ¼ inch ‘broad gauge’ philosophy harking back to the construction of the railway in the late 1830’s by the engineering genius *Isambard Kingdom Brunel* (1806-1859). In stark contrast, the rest of the railway companies in Great Britain were using the 4ft 8½ inches ‘standard’ gauge introduced by *George Stephenson*. A conversion was inevitable, and a start made in 1866 with lines north of Oxford. The final conversion took place between daybreak on Saturday 21st May 1892 and completed by 4am on Monday 23rd May 1892! This ‘works photograph’ of standard gauge ‘Achilles’ (built in March 1894) shows an elegant 4-2-2 express engine type which spans the final conversion, as some were built as broad gauge, and others, such as N^o. 3031 ‘Achilles’, as standard gauge.



Acknowledgements to John Nelson - The Handbook of British Perfins (1967).